DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 006 CG 023 963

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TITLE The Role of the Counseling Psychologist in Academia and Research.
PUB DATE Aug 91
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (99th, San Francisco, CA, August 16-20, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Anxiety; Counseling; Counselor Role; *Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Psychologists; Research Opportunities; Research Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Counseling Psychology

ABSTRACT

In reference to the topic of research, it seems an incongruence exists between what academic counseling psychologists would prefer versus what graduate students actually do. One of the first fears experienced by novice graduate students surrounds taking statistics and research methodology courses. Normalizing the statistics-related anxiety, and separating out statistics from research design seem to be two ways of diffusing some of the statistics and research methodology taboo; and diffusing this taboo might well increase interest in research activities among graduate students. The second issue involves nurturing research interests in graduate students. This can be accomplished by including graduate students in research activities that are minimally threatening yet still intellectually challenging. It seems important to include graduate students in the entire process of conducting research, from the initial conceptualization of the research idea to either the final revision before publication or the discarding of the rejection letter, whichever the case may be. The third issue involves counseling psychology programs' tradition of using a scientist/practitioner model to educate graduate students. It seems important to inform graduate students that they need not necessarily be involved in scientific endeavors 50 percent of the time. Demonstrating the interplay between the roles of scientist and practitioner is another way to increase graduate student interest in research activities. (LLL)

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The Role of the Counseling Psychologist in Academia and Research

(Presented as part of the Division 17 Symposium: Crystal Ball Gazing for the Roles of Counseling Psychologists in the 1990's.)

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, August, 1991, San Francisco, California.

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I would especially like to thank M. Kristine Bronson, Susan Phillips, and Donna Palladino for their careful review of earlier drafts of this presentation.

CG023963

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The Role of the Counseling Psychologist in Academia/Research

The number of roles of the Counseling Psychologist in academia and research are too many and too varied to cover within the scope of this presentation. Therefore, this presentation is specifically focused on the role of academic Counseling Psychologists in the stimulation of research activities among graduate students. This focus was chosen because of the importance of research activities in graduate training programs as well as the role of research activities in promoting the advancement of the field of Counseling Psychology.

Studies have indicated that most graduate programs hold research in the highest regard. However, it seems that for some time now most graduate students are not interested in research and most do not engage in research activities following graduate school. How can this be the case when on many graduate school applications the student explicitly states that he or she is interested in doing research? Either the student writes this only to help oneself get into graduate school and saw research akin to eating one's vegetables in order to get to desert, or, something happens along the way in the graduate student's training, such that research, like some vegetables, ends up leaving a bad taste in his or her mouth.

Thus, in reference to the topic of research, it seems an incongruence exists between what academic Counseling Psychologists would prefer versus what graduate students actually do. Based on the presumption that research in Counseling Psychology is important, the purpose of this presentation is to present some ideas on how academic Counseling Psychologists can prevent research from leaving a bad taste in the mouths

of graduate students. Alternatively, how can the academic Counseling Psychologist stimulate research activities in graduate students? Due to time limitations, only three issues will be discussed relating to the research training of graduate students. These issues are (1) dealing with statistics and research methodology related anxiety, (2) nurturing research interests, and (3) integrating the scientist and practitioner. I would like to credit the article "Research in Counseling: Methodological and Professional Issues" by Charles Gelso (1979) as a stimulus for some ideas in this presentation.

(1) Dealing with statistics and research methodology related anxiety

The first issue I would like to raise pertains to diffusing the statistics and research methodology taboo, or refuting the assertion that "stats is a four letter word." One of the first fears experienced by novice graduate students surrounds taking statistics and research methodology courses. It seems that in order to stimulate research interests in novice graduate students, the taboo in graduate school surrounding statistics and research methodology must somehow be diffused. I would argue that, for graduate students, the biggest obstacle to learning statistics and research methodology is not any inherent intellectual deficits, but rather the anxiety related to the topic. This being the case, the role of the academic Counseling Psychologist would be to assist in the recognition and alleviation of math related anxiety by normalizing the graduate student experience. One way to accomplish this normalization is by academic Counseling Psychologists identifying with graduate students and disclosing their own past and present struggles with statistics and research design. A second method of diffusing the tentativeness with which graduate students

approach statistics and research design involves separating statistics from research design, by demonstrating that researchers in Counseling Psychology are "logicians of science, not statisticians." What this means is that statistics are used as a tool to help answer a question based on sound logic. It is unlikely that any graduate student in Counseling Psychology will master statistics by taking two or three graduate courses. Furthermore, I would guess that very few Counseling Psychology graduate students are preparing themselves for a career as a statistician. However, I would argue that graduate students are probably more accepting and willing to involve themselves in the creation of research ideas as well as learning the concept of logical thinking, areas at which they are probably very talented. Therefore, both normalizing the statistics related anxiety and separating out statistics from research design seems to be two ways of diffusing some of the statistics and research methodology taboo; and diffusing this taboo might well increase interest in research activities among graduate students.

(2) Nurturing research interests

The second issue to be raised involves nurturing research interests in graduate students. This can be accomplished by including graduate students in research activities that are "minimally threatening" yet still "intellectually challenging". The challenge to academic Counseling Psychologists is to discover what research activities are minimally threatening yet intellectually challenging? First of all, I would argue that research activities can become "minimally threatening" primarily from faculty members displaying enthusiasm, encouragement, and support towards graduate students involved in research. Clearly it would be less

threatening to work with an enthusiastic professor rather than one who is primarily authoritative. I would further argue that research activities can be "intellectually challenging" if the research advisor and the graduate student work together to decide with which aspect of a given research project the graduate student feels most comfortable, rather than the faculty member implying that the student's sole mission in life is data coding and data entry. It also seems important to include graduate students in the entire process of conducting research, from the initial conceptualization of the research idea to either the final revision before publication or the discarding of the rejection letter, whichever the case may be. Thus, by recognizing graduate students' needs, academic Counseling Psychologists may nurture the research interests of graduate students and increase their involvement in research activities.

(3) Integrating the scientist and practitioner

The third and final issue to be raised involves counseling psychology programs' tradition of using a scientist/practitioner model to educate graduate students. It seems important to inform graduate students that in order for them to be a scientific/practitioner they need not necessarily be involved in scientific endeavors 50% of the time and therapeutic work 50% of the time. It would also be helpful if academic Counseling Psychologists assist graduate students in recognizing that the skills learned while conducting research are transferable to the counseling environment. For example, it could be demonstrated that important research skills, such as objective observation and unbiased hypothesis testing, can be vital when engaging in therapeutic activities. Alternatively, faculty members could demonstrate that questions that arise during counseling could be

transferred into research applications. Demonstrating the interplay between the roles of scientist and practitioner is another way to increase graduate student interest in research activities.

In closing, there are impressive implications of increasing graduate students' interest in research activities. As a result of the increased interest theses and dissertations may be completed with less difficulty as well as more expediently. Also, one could expect research productivity to increase for a given department. For graduate students who intend to become academic psychologists, one could expect increased sensitivity towards their students' research training. For most graduate students, those who later become professionals employed outside the academic setting, early positive research experiences could lead them to become better consumers of research. For such individuals, these early experiences may also increase the likelihood that they work closely with academic psychologists and, perhaps, pursue researchable ideas in whatever setting they work. In conclusion, the manner in which academic Counseling Psychologists meet the challenge of stimulating research interests in graduate students will to some extent determine the future of Counseling Psychology in the 1990's and beyond.

References

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